

T r a n s l a t i o n of an article published in the Oberlaendisches Volksblatt, Friday/Saturday, September 29/30, 1978, Interlaken, Switzerland (page 4):

S w i s s - A m e r i c a n s S e a r c h f o r T r a c e s o f t h e i r A n c e s t o r s

In the second half of the last century and even at the beginning of the 20th century, the "Land of Unlimited Possibilities" enticed many Europeans to emigrate. One reason was the shortage of land, particularly in the mountain regions, which caused the inability to sustain the many, often large families who lived there. Another reason was that government officials encouraged unpopular persons who were objectionable for whatever reason to leave the country.

The fact that a Mormon Branch consisting of about twenty persons had established itself in Guendlischwand did not suit the pastor at Gsteig near Interlaken, in which parish Guendlischwand was situated. In fact, he was so upset by their presence that instead of following the instructions of the Gsteig Parish Council and contacting District Commissioner Ritschard in Interlaken, the pastor turned directly to the government authorities in Bern.

The district commissioner, who was then requested by the Bernese officials to make a report concerning the affair, criticized the arbitrary steps taken by the pastor, who had sounded such an alarm in Bern instead of following the normal official procedures in such matters.

Such discrimination against other religious denominations was surely one of the reasons that the members of the Mormon Church turned their backs to their native home in order to seek their fortune or at least eke out an existence in a foreign country or across the sea.

Some of those who were persecuted immigrated to Russia; another group immigrated to their faithful brethren in Salt Lake City and the surrounding area. Even today one finds many Swiss in the state of Idaho who are still loyal to the memories of their native homeland. Among them is the Kunz Family, whose common ancestor emigrated from the Simmental and in whose family the emigrants from Guendlischwand are included.

Thirty-five relatives from the States recently visited the Oberland to retrace the steps of many members of the Kunz family. They visited in Guendlischwand, and they visited in the Simmental where in the Diemtig Canyon they met with Swiss relatives at a family gathering. A total of 170 people participated in the festivities -- 40 Americans, 40 descendants of those who had earlier emigrated to Russia, and 90 Swiss relatives, nearly all of whom met for the very first time. A relative who is studying in Switzerland organized the gathering.

The group has already received attention. An exhibit in Bern was organized in their behalf, and the television will devote a short report to the guests from the USA.

The 35 Swiss-Americans, most of whom are no longer capable of speaking our language, spent their holiday in the Hotel Chalet Swiss in Unterseen. Is it not amusing that the visitors from America who are being excellently taken care of on their excursions by a relative who lives in Switzerland -- for some time now, as a matter of fact, a resident of Interlaken -- and pampered by the owner of the hotel, coincidentally found lodging in the imposing house which at one time was built by none other than District Commissioner Ritschard, the very individual who in his report to the government authorities was so protective of their ancestors ?

Tomorrow, Saturday, the guests from the United States will leave our area and after a short visit to Germany return to their home in the "new" land.

The "Volksblatt/Echo" would also like to wish these loyal Swiss-Americans a good trip home and the best wishes in the future.